

While the Seagull was Watching by nmnostalgidrabbles

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: :), Fix It Fic, Kinda, M/M, billy and max being siblings!!, billy becoming a person, i dont give an explanation cause i couldnt come up with one lol, so just roll with it

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Summary:

Billy's alive, but then what?

While the Seagull was Watching

Author's Note:

me? writing stranger things ff in 2021? its likelier than you think and im sorry
i really didnt want to get into the billy/steve scene but here we are
had trouble deciding whether i wanted this to be two separate fics, b/c initially what i wanted to write was just a story where billy and max get to be real siblings and have a meaningful relationship because i was so moved by the season 3 finale (and i know everybody seems to hate season 3 but i really enjoyed it??) and billy's potential, but then the idea for the second half to me and ahhhh
tried to write billy and max's reunion realistically?? but who knows, lmk what you think!
unbeta'd per use
thanks for reading!!

He comes to a long way from Hawkins. California, washed up on a beach like seaweed and feeling like it. A wave crawls toward him, touches his feet, his chest, his mouth and he sputters, more sand than water, and he realizes, actually, that he is alive. Alive enough to feel his throat burn and abdomen contract as he coughs, which is strange, because the last he remembered it wasn't there anymore, but he sits up and every part of him is present, in-tact, and real. Except for his clothes – they're torn to shreds and stained black and red. He holds his stomach like his insides might fall out, recalls the pain, and turns onto his hands and knees to vomit.

A seagull perches on a near-by piece of driftwood to watch, and if any coherent thought exists in his mind, it's *fuck*, because he's *here*, in California again and it *hurts*. He doesn't allow himself to think about her anymore; instead, he makes it to his feet and stumbles into a diner however many miles and three hours later. He finds he doesn't have his wallet – or shoes – but the woman at the counter takes incredible pity on him and gives him coffee and bacon and eggs. In

another context he'd make eyes at her and flirt and they'd end up naked somewhere but then he thinks maybe not anymore. Maybe something has shifted in his hierarchy of needs. Very high on that list is a shower and clean clothes, for instance.

He finds a quarter on the street and phones home. His sister answers.

"Max?"

The line is quiet. He can't even hear her breathe. He's afraid she'll hang up, so he continues.

"It's me. I'm – in California, somewhere."

"...Billy?"

"The girl, can she find me?"

"*Billy,*"

He feels a little more human, which if he thinks about too hard, makes him nervous, considering.

"Don't wear it out," he says, *the name*, to put both of them at ease. Has he ever joked with her?

"Oh my God,"

And she's crying, for the second time in her life for him, rather than because of him. His chest tightens.

"I don't have any money."

"She's gone," Max croaks. "Moved away, so she can't find you. And her powers are gone too."

"Are you okay? Is everyone okay?"

"I'm fine, we're all fine. But Hopper's gone. Gone gone."

Billy thinks. "I'll get some money, but it's gonna take a while. Don't – don't tell them." Their parents, he means. She knows.

“Don’t fucking die again,” she says.

“I’m sorry,” he says.

It does take a while. A month, roughly, washing dishes at the diner and sleeping on the beach to earn enough for bus fare. He cleans himself up in the restaurant bathroom and eats what they’ll throw out at the end of the night. Some of his charisma comes back and he does flirt with the waitress, but it doesn’t go anywhere. She knows he’ll be gone soon.

He gets back on a Friday evening. His father and stepmother are out for dinner. Max comes home alone on her bike, and he winces at the thought of the boy. Lucas? Lucas.

He doesn’t know how to do it – to announce himself. He’s nervous, he’s actually nervous because all that arrogance and pride seemed to have washed away while the seagull was watching, and he was just bare. He’d spent years making Max’s life hell all so he could feel some semblance of control, and she had every right to reject him. All he’d done to correct it was gurgle a *sorry* before he’d – he’d *whatever*, and what weight could a single word have? He thinks about what to say but nothing comes. She drops her bike in the yard and unlocks the front door and goes inside.

In the end he just knocks and she answers and she throws herself into him and squeezes him so tightly he thinks maybe the wounds aren’t so far gone after all. But he holds her back, feels her shoulders shake, and lets himself feel loved again.

Upstairs, in his bedroom, he asks, “What did you tell them?”

“That you met some girl and just left.”

He snorted.

“They believed it.”

It's quiet, and it's obvious to him they're both thinking about why they believed it.

He swallows; this anxious thing – he doesn't like it. It was easier to be an ass.

"Max, I'm sorry. For everything. For everything."

The apologies and tenderness last all of a week before they get to arguing again, but it isn't hateful. It's *normal* – about missing hairspray and *you're using all the hot water!* and once they've cooled off, though they're both suddenly too stubborn to apologize, there's reconciliation. He'll stand in her doorway with his arms crossed over his chest and she'll pretend she doesn't notice.

"Want to go get ice cream?" he'll ask.

"Okay," she'll reply.

He doesn't know why or how he came back, but he's glad.

Another ceasefire tactic is renting movies, and that's where he sees Steve for the first time since the mall.

Steve balks, scrambles for a weapon – comes up with a life-size cut out of some movie character – and pulls Max behind him.

"Don't cream your pants," Billy says with a smirk, different from before. "We're here for Star Trek."

"Star Wars," Max corrects.

"Well, with that attitude we're going home."

Max scoffs. "Okay, *dad*."

"If you love me, at all, never call me that again –"

"Is someone going to explain what's going on here?" Steve interjects, still holding his cardboard person-weapon. "You two getting along and you not dead?"

Even Billy doesn't have those answers, and Max's gone to find the movie, so he just shrugs.

"Stranger things have happened."

Steve's face reads like that's not near a good-enough answer but he says, "Sure."

February fourteenth finds Billy wondering when Lucas will appear with some ridiculously large stuffed something, or candy, or flowers, or whatever teenagers who give a shit about Valentine's Day give to each other, and it finds Max curled on her bed wondering it too. Neither know that the boys did in fact have something ridiculous planned, but had hit a snafu in production and were temporarily delayed.

Billy is relearning empathy, though doesn't know it consciously or in such terms; he just knows he wants his sister to feel better. He finds the stuffed bear he'd planned on disemboweling and mailing to Harrington for kicks, and instead tosses it to her from her the hallway as he walks past her room with faux nonchalance.

Before, Billy and Steve had had sex twice, though that wasn't really the right way to put it. They'd fucked twice, because there hadn't been anything non-carnal about it. They were just looking for distractions and chasing a high.

The first was in April, a wet spring night Billy had spent smoking at a drive-in with some girl. She'd found a group of her friends and he was irritated that she was socializing more with them than drooling over him, and Steve was there with, of all people, one of Max's friends. He couldn't remember the kid's name, just that he had curly hair. They run into each other at the snack booth.

“Pretty lousy show, huh.” Steve offers, taking a bite of something chocolatey. It seems he’s going for normalcy. He doesn’t want to fight. Strangely, neither does Billy, but he’s still agitated.

Billy shrugs. “Thinkin’ about getting out of here, actually.”

He watches Steve swallow.

“Oh?”

There’s a hotel ten minutes away. Billy pushes Steve until he’s on his back on the bed, mostly unclothed. Steve’s terrified – in part because the last time Billy sat on his waist he was bat-shit crazy and beat the hell out of him – but he doesn’t feel like backing out, not now, not with how those heavy-lashed eyes are looking at him, but he still feels vulnerable. He wonders if it’s how Nancy felt. Opening his legs for someone is incredibly embarrassing it turns out, and he avoids it by turning on his elbows and knees and purposefully not looking at Someone.

The second time, it’s June, Billy’s been working at the pool and brings an equally tanned girl in to Scoops every now and then with an arm around her shoulder or finger in her belt loop. He looks Steve directly in the eyes as he licks his freshly dipped cone, once. Steve finds it absolutely obscene.

They go to the hotel again, the same room. For reasons Steve doesn’t know and Billy can’t put into words, near the end he snakes a hand up Steve torso and lets it curl, without pressure, around Steve’s neck, and Steve finds it *thrilling*. He knows it’s because he’s both terribly depressed and terribly numb working a dead-end job for shit pay for how many months now? that he doesn’t just feel, he feels acutely the soft fingertips that had carried out such violence touch his jaw with care, and hot breath that had delivered threats and swears on his neck that say they *want* him. He’s *wanted*.

The third time isn’t a fuck, or sex at all. It’s just kissing after hours at

the video shop with Steve's back pressed against the counter. There aren't a lot of words before or after, but Billy thinks back to *stranger things have happened*, and thinks he doesn't mind this kind of strange.